

# The Workplace

Volume 2. 24

December 30, 2001

## A Fact Sheet

### Highlights

Workers most at risk for becoming victims of violence are those who:

- Come into contact with the public.
- Handle money.
- Deliver passengers or products.
- Are mobile while on the job.
- Work with potentially violent individuals.
- Work alone, in small numbers or nights.
- Have jobs in or drive through high-crime areas.
- Are based within the community.

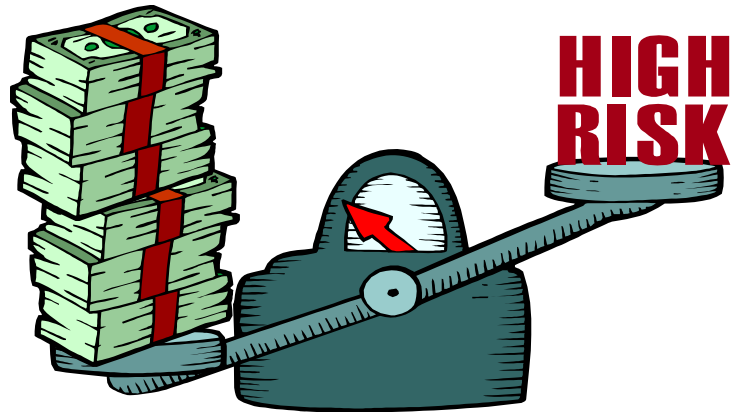
Recommended controls include:

- Installing physical barriers.
- Providing unobstructed visibility ; bright lighting.
- Avoiding entrapment.

## Understanding Workplace Violence: Factors that Put Workers at Risk

Acts of violence in the workplace have received widespread attention in recent years. Homicides committed by former or disgruntled employees receive vast amounts of media coverage but are only a fraction of all workplace violence. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), violence in work settings have emerged as an important safety and health issue. Violence resulting in death has become the second leading cause of fatal occupational injury in the United States.

Providing a safe environment for workers includes being able to recognize potential risk for violent behavior and taking appropriate steps to eliminate as many risks as possible. The objectives of this issue of *The Workplace* are to: 1) Provide a working definition of workplace violence; 2) Give a general list of factors more likely to put employees at risk for becoming victims of violence; 3) Present a list of guidelines to help minimize workplace violence.



Persons responsible for handling money as a routine part of their job are at greater risk for becoming the victim of violence.

Workplace violence, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, *can be any act of physical violence, threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening, disruptive behavior that occurs at the place of work.* Acts of violence are not always fatal. The broad USDA definition encompasses more than physical assaults to include making violent threats, sexual assaults and harassment, verbal abuse, etc. As many as 1.5 million non-fatal violent acts are committed in the workplace annually. Many incidents of workplace violence incidents can be traced directly to violence in the home and/or community.

Providing a workplace that is as free as possible of the potential for violent behavior is complicated. In every work situation risk factors, i.e., any condition or circumstance that may increase the possibility of having a violent act occur, are both present and different. The potential for violence occurring increases as the number of risk factors increase. Knowing which risk factors will trigger a violent episode is impossible; however, research shows that workers most at risk for becoming victims of workplace violence are those who:

- Come into contact with the public.
- Have responsibility for handling money.
- Deliver passengers or products.
- Are mobile while on the job, such as home health-care providers.
- Have responsibility for working with potentially violent individuals, such as those incarcerated.
- Work alone or in small numbers.
- Work nights.
- Have jobs in or drive through high-crime areas.
- Are based within the community.

“Homicides committed by former or disgruntled employees . . . are only a fraction of all violence in the workplace.”

- alarm systems and panic buttons, height markers on exit doors, surveillance systems.
- Building elevated vantage points.
- Providing unobstructed visibility of service and cash register areas.
  - Replacing existing lights with bright, effective lighting.
  - Hiring ample staffing.
  - Arranging furniture to avoid entrapment.
  - Posting emergency procedures to use in the event of a robbery.
  - Establishing liaison with local police.

Additional information may be obtained from the OSHA website (<http://www.osha.gov/oshinfo/priorities/violence.html>).

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers guidelines to help minimize workplace violence and its effects. A few of the recommended controls include:

- Installing physical barriers such as bullet-resistant enclosures and pass-through windows, installing

**Dr. Jacquelyn P. Robinson**

**Community Workforce Development Specialist**

**Alabama Cooperative Extension System**

AUTHOR INFORMATION:

Dr. Jacquelyn P. Robinson  
 Community Workforce  
 Development Specialist  
 State Headquarters  
 216 Extension Hall  
 Auburn University, AL 36849-5631  
 Telephone (334) 844-5353  
 FAX (334) 844-9022  
[jrobinso@aces.edu](mailto:jrobinso@aces.edu)

**Sources:**

- AFSCME (2001). Controlling and Preventing Workplace Violence. *Preventing Workplace Violence*. <http://www.afscme.org/>
- L&I Online (2000). Workplace Violence Report. *Workplace Violence Awareness and Prevention for Employers and Employees*. Access Washington, Washington State Information and Services. <http://www.wa.gov>.
- OSHA (2000). Workplace Violence. *OSHA Workplace Violence Summary Sheet*. (<http://www.osha.gov/oshinfo/priorities/violence.html>)
- USDA (2001). Workplace Violence. *The USDA Handbook on Workplace Violence Prevention and Response*. <http://www.usda.gov/>



Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability.